

...that Boko Haram attacked Nigerian churches over the past two consecutive Christmas holidays?

Boko Haram, a violent religious extremist group, has been responsible for a series of deadly attacks around the 2010 and 2011 Christmas holidays. On Christmas day 2011, bombings occurred in or around churches in Jos, Kano, Madalla, Gadaka, and Damaturu; 40 died in Madalla alone. On Christmas Eve 2010, a policeman was killed while guarding a church and a number of churches were attacked in Maiduguri, killing six and injuring 25.

Boko Haram is an Islamic sect from northern Nigeria that views as morally corrupt the federal and northern state governments, as well as political and religious leaders. The group rejects the west and the secular state and seeks the universal implementation of “pure” sharia law to resolve the ills facing northern Nigerian Muslims. Boko Haram targets anyone or any institution opposing its world view, including Muslim clerics, politicians, police stations, government buildings, churches, newspapers, banks, and schools. Its tactics include drive-by shootings on motorcycles and the use of improvised explosive devices, and starting in 2011, suicide bombings.

Boko Haram attacks have not been limited to Christmas. Throughout 2012, Boko Haram, or people thought to be affiliated with or sympathetic to the group, attacked at least 30 churches, killing and injuring hundreds. In an effort to further destabilize Nigeria, these church attacks are predominantly occurring in northern cities that have a history of sectarian violence, including

Bauchi, Jos, and Kaduna. Boko Haram leaders have justified these attacks on churches and Christians by singling out Nigeria's history of sectarian violence and impunity, stating that the violence is in retaliation for the killing of Muslims by Christians in Kaduna and Plateau states.

Sectarian violence in Nigeria dates back to 1999 – long before the Boko Haram phenomenon – with more than 14,000 Nigerians having been killed in religiously-related violence between Muslims and Christians. Because the government of Nigeria continues to fail to prevent and contain acts of religiously-related violence, prevent reprisal attacks, or bring to justice those responsible for such violence, USCIRF has recommended that Nigeria be designated a “country of particular concern” for tolerating systematic, ongoing and egregious violations of religious freedom. Other religious freedom concerns in Nigeria include the application of a strict interpretation of shariah in the criminal codes of several northern Nigerian states and discrimination against minority communities of Christians and Muslims. For more information, see USCIRF's July 2012 [*Factsheet: Religious Freedom Violations and Religious Violence in Nigeria*](#) :